Introduction

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Palaeolithic cultures have been investigated in Japan for only 60 years but in that rather brief period, the archaeology of Japan's Pleistocene occupation has been an active field. The papers assembled here indicate that innovative methods, approaches, and issues are still being addressed by the emerging generation of Japanese Palaeolithic specialists. The goal of this special issue is to present the kinds of Palaeolithic research being done in Japan and to encourage world archaeologists to view Japanese research as an important source of information on East Asian and World archaeology.

Tadahiro Aizawa's 1949 discovery of stone assemblages in loam layers long thought to be sterile challenged established archaeological understanding (Befu and Chard 1960; Serizawa and Ikawa 1958). The realization that these materials dated from pre-Holocene times significantly expanded the scope of Jomon studies and also, of course, gave Palaeolithic researchers a huge agenda. By the 1970s, thousands of Pleistocene-age sites had been discovered and culture-historical researchers had begun to sort out regional variants and arrange them in temporal order (Chard 1974; Serizawa 1979). To do that, Japanese Palaeolithic researchers had to develop original analytical methods and research strategies. They established refined excavation systems, distinctive illustration techniques, and virtuosic analytical procedures that were essentially original. Japanese Palaeolithic researchers had no traditions to follow or relevant foreign models to adapt, so developing these methods and a shared research agenda had to be original. As interesting and innovative as these developments may have been, they were not easily used or emulated by non-Japanese archaeologists, if only because they were almost invariably presented in Japanese (Bleed 2001). Japanese researchers have worked to make the results of their work available to world audiences. Notably in that regard, Akira Ono and Masami Izuho (2006) have presented a series of brief treatments of developments in Japanese Palaeolithic research. And some international scholars have recognized that the bulk and quality of Japanese Palaeolithic research could shed light on the general problems of Asian and north Pacific prehistory. Fumiko Ikawa-Smith has led this effort, time and again bringing the quality of Japanese Palaeolithic research and Pleistocene chronological studies to bear on issues of world archaeology (Ikawa-Smith 1978, 1982, 2004).

As Japanese researchers sorted out the culture-historical structure of the Palaeolithic record, they discovered some unexpected patterns that prompted reconsideration of widely held views. Discovery and detailed technological assessment of refined

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Asian Perspectives, Vol. 49, No. 2 © 2011 by the University of Hawai'i Press.

microblade industries in Japan (Hayashi 1968; Kobayashi 1970) had a major impact on thinking about how humans came to occupy Siberia, Beringia, and the New World. Two other Palaeolithic discoveries were more challenging to world archaeologists when they were reported by Japanese researchers. The recognition that Palaeolithic-age edge-ground tools were produced in Japan long before they were common in other regions came as a surprise (Oda and Keally 1973). Even harder for researchers in other regions to initially accept was the discovery of ceramics in association with Japanese Palaeolithic artifacts in strata that dated from the terminal Pleistocene (Ikawa-Smith 1976). The sincere debate and legitimate deliberation that surrounded those challenging discoveries formed the background for the scandal that swept across Japanese archaeology in 2000 when it was revealed that amazingly complex materials that appeared to demonstrate an "early Palaeolithic" occupation in Japan were all a faked hoax. As Nakazawa shows in his opening article, dealing with that fraud has encouraged many Japanese Palaeolithic researchers to consider the methods and approach of their field.

Perhaps the most important characteristic of the papers presented here is that they contain little that is controversial. They address substantive issues of archaeological research with methods that are clear, explicit, and rigorous without depending on results that are startling or contentious. This certainly shows that Japanese Palaeolithic research has moved on from the scandal of 2000, although as Nakazawa's overview indicates, Japanese researchers are willing to address the conditions of their discipline that allowed the scandal to occur. This article documents the richness of the Japanese Palaeolithic record. Together with Yamaoka's exploration of transitions, Nakazawa's article also offers proof positive that Japanese archaeologists are still exploring broad issues of culture history and chronology. Without expecting the specific patterns observed in Japan to be exactly replicated elsewhere in Eurasia, the depth of detail of the Japanese Palaeolithic record should encourage archaeologists from other regions.

Barnes and Okita (1999) showed that detailed consideration of "lifeways research" developed as a focus of Japanese archaeology in the 1990s. That theme continues to interest Japanese researchers as shown by Katsunori Takase's analysis of end scrapers. That analysis combines close descriptive observation with discussion of behavioral implications and produces an analysis that is interestingly close to the "processual plus" approach described by Michelle Hegmon (2003). Extremely careful excavation has long been a hallmark of Japanese archaeology, but Takanori Sakashita points the descriptive potential of detailed observations in behavioral directions by combining it with consideration of thermal alteration. The result is an interesting exposition of Upper Palaeolithic residential patterns and a methodological approach that has broad potential applications. Kaoru Yonekura presents another experimental study of heat alternation and shows that the potential benefits of heat treatment are best exposed through formal consideration of flaked stone tools and production sequences.

Virtuosic analysis of stone tool forms and stone tool production patterns have been a hallmark of Japanese Palaeolithic research. Three articles presented here show how Japanese archaeologists are pushing those emphases in new directions. Research reported by Katsuhiro Sano brings Palaeolithic research in regional directions by using raw material to reconstruct mobility patterns. In a similar vein, Kohtaro Yoshikawa uses distribution of lithic raw material to define Upper Palaeolithic territories and hunting ranges. Finally, Jun Takakura expands the traditional focus of microblade refitting studies by showing how those highly refined techniques were part of larger blade

reduction systems. Significantly, he positions these in regional context. Given that organic remains are virtually never preserved in Japanese sites, these thoughtful considerations of stone usage offer a way of giving Japanese Paleolithic research a regional rather than a site emphasis. This kind of research harmonizes with the interests and techniques being explored by Americanist lithic analyst (Andrefsky 2009).

In addition to the specific expansions and innovations contained in these articles, they present another novel fact about modern Japanese Palaeolithic research. As explored by a number of analysts, Japanese archaeology is a highly refined discipline with distinctive intellectual and social features and considerable impact on Japanese society (Fawcett 1996; Habu and Fawcett 1999, 2008; Hudson 2004). And that points up a final interesting feature of the articles presented here, and of Japanese Palaeolithic research in general. Many of these authors have sought experiences outside of Japan. They have studied the issues and methods of non-Japanese archaeology and are eager to engage a broad professional audience. To be sure many Japanese archaeologists have traveled widely, worked on international teams, and conducted research in other areas. Archaeologists have also called attention to evidence of ancient contact between Japan and other areas. But to a far greater degree than in any other part of Japan's archaeological past, Palaeolithic researchers can usefully interact with international archaeologists. Simply put, Japanese Palaeolithic research seems to be the most cosmopolitan specialty in Japanese archaeology.

The challenge in assembling a group of articles on a dynamic topic is presenting them as a worthwhile digest and substantial contribution without also offering them as a complete or ultimate account. Those presented here illustrate the issues and substance being explored by Japanese Palaeolithic specialists. This collection cannot be offered as an encapsulation of the current field, but it seems clearly to suggest that Japanese research will continue to produce interesting information and stimulating analyses on Asia's ancient past.

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ABSTRACT

This serves as an introduction to eight articles on Japanese Palaeolithic archaeology that illustrate the types of research issues recently addressed and the kinds of archaeological data currently available on Pleistocene deposits in Japan. The articles also show how Japanese researchers are setting out to explain Palaeolithic variability at various scales, including the regional level. Perhaps, most importantly, given the recriminations following the relatively recent exposure of faked "early and middle Palaeolithic" artifacts in Japan, these papers show how Palaeolithic archeologists working in Japan have recognized the importance of presenting reliable archaeological and paleoenvironmental data in the context of clear research methodology. KEYWORDS: Palaeolithic, Japan, Pleistocene, lithic technology.